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CATALOGUE
OF AN
EXHIBITION
OF
VENETIAN AND OTHER
ETCHINGS
BY
JAMES McNEILL WHISTLER

THE FINE ART SOCIETY, LTD.,
148, NEW BOND STREET, W. 1.
JUNE, 1929.

No. 780



THE BRIDGE. (K 201)

A WHISTLER JUBILEE.

(1879-1929.)

IN the early Summer of 1879, Whistler was at the nadir of his fortune. In the preceding Autumn he had lost his libel suit against Ruskin, and the payment of his law costs was the beginning of his financial ruin. Nobody was willing to buy any of his pictures and he was totally unable to avoid bankruptcy. In the early part of 1879 he had to abandon his Chelsea home, "The White House," and all that it contained was sold for the benefit of his creditors. He lost then not only his collection of Chinese porcelain but even the plates of his etchings and the studies in his studio. He was left with nothing but his genius.

At this critical moment in his life the Fine Art Society, to its eternal credit, came to the rescue of the harassed artist. Stoutly believing

in his genius and willing to back their opinion handsomely, the Directors of this Society commissioned Whistler to go to Venice and there execute a series of etchings. They paid all expenses of his voyage in advance, and agreed to take one dozen plates at the price of six hundred pounds. Further, they undertook to give Whistler ten shillings for each proof if on his return he wished to print his etchings himself.

Thus, once more with money in his pocket Whistler arrived in Venice towards the end of September, 1879. All the world knows how he then proceeded to make history in the art of etching. Whistler's Venetian etchings were different from anything of the kind that had ever been seen before. "As for the work of his needle, it was of a wonderful lightness and, compared with his previous works, showed a remarkable simplification," wrote the distinguished French critic M. Theodore Duret. "Never had anybody tried to render so much with so little toil apparent, but the success was complete," said the same authority.

It is to celebrate this historic commission,

given exactly fifty years ago, that the Fine Art Society is holding the present exhibition.

Whistler remained fourteen months in Venice and returned to London in November, 1880. He brought back fifty etchings from which the Fine Art Society made its choice of twelve subjects. One hundred proofs of each were taken and the price of each complete set was put at fifty guineas. In December, 1880 these etchings, printed by Whistler himself, were shown at the Society's Galleries, 148, New Bond Street.

Though the sales were tolerably satisfactory, the reception these etchings obtained in the Press was scarcely favourable. "Another crop of Mr. Whistler's little jokes" was the verdict of "Truth," while other journalists dubbed them "disastrous failures," "Vulgar," and "Amateur." The tide did not begin to turn till the Fine Art Society held a second exhibition of Whistler's Venetian pieces in February, 1883, but the victory was definitely won when Messrs. Dowdeswell in 1886 exhibited Whistler's last series of Venetian etchings.

Much water has run through the Venetian lagoons during the last fifty years, and to-day the appreciation of Whistler's Venetian etchings needs no helping hand. The original set of twelve, published by the Fine Art Society at fifty guineas, is to-day very greatly enhanced in value. The impressions of these plates are so scarce—so many are locked up in the museums of Europe and America—that it has only been possible to get together two or three (nos. 41, 45, 49) for the purpose of this exhibition. Nevertheless, the present collection represents fairly, if not exhaustively, the range and variety of Whistler's total achievement in Venice. It includes a complete set of the last Venetian series, and other interesting examples of Whistler's masterly practice in etching.

FRANK RUTTER.

CATALOGUE

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THE TWENTY-SIX ETCHINGS

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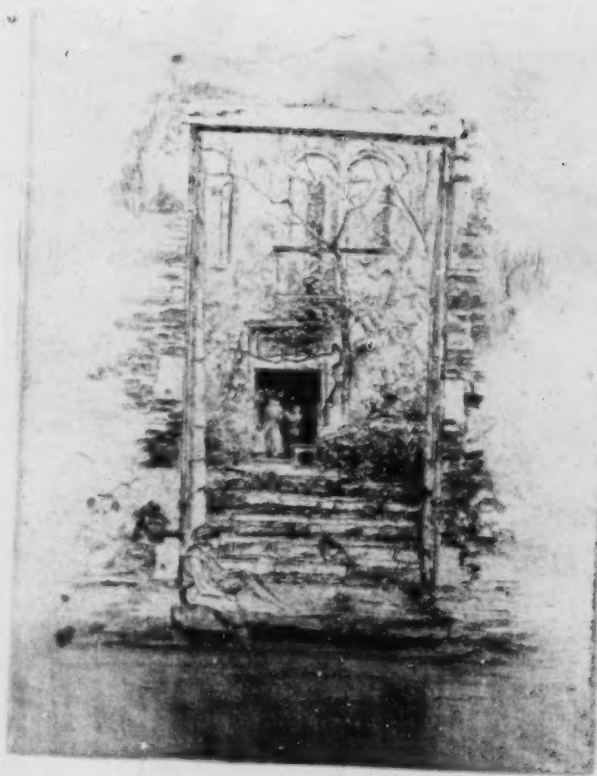
THE SECOND VENETIAN SET.

1. La Salute—Dawn (K 215)
2. Garden (K 210. VII. of VIII.)
3. Lagoon—Noon (K 216)
4. Turkeys (K 199)
5. Doorway and Vine (K 196. V. of IX.)
6. Fruit Stall (K 200)

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- 7 The Wheelwright (K 233)
 - 8 The Balcony (K 207. Between IV. and V., undescribed in Kennedy)
 - 9 Little Court (K 236)
 - 10 San Biagio (K 197)
 - 11 Nocturne—Palaces (K 202. VIII. of IX.)
 - 12 Temple (K 234)
 - 13 Riva, No. 2 (K 206. I. of II.)
 - 14 Lobster Pots (K 235)
 - 15 Upright Venice (K 205. II. of IV.)
 - 16 Long Lagoon (K 203)
 - 17 Quiet Canal (K 214)
 - 18 The Rialto (K 211)
 - 19 Ponte del Piovan (K 209)
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- 20 Long Venice (K 212)
- 21 Drury Lane (K 237)
- 22 Furnace—Nocturne (K 213. VI. of VII.)
- 23 The Bridge (K 204)
- 24 Fishing Boat (K 208. IV. of V.)
- 25 Bead Stringers (K 198)
- 26 San Giorgio (K 201)
- 4 27 Swan and Iris (K 241)
- 6 28 Landscape with a Horse (K 36)
- 55 29 Old Westminster Bridge (K 39)
- 10 30 Reading by Lamplight (K 32)
- 50 31 The Pool (K 43)
- 500 32 The Rialto (K 211)
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- 35 33 The Forge (K 68)
- 55 34 Thames Police (K 44)
- 10 35 Fumette (K 13)
- 40 36 Thames Warehouses (K 38)
- 75 37 Price's Candle Works (K 154)
- 4 38 Seymour Seated (K 29)
- 70 39 Fleur de Lys Passage, Houndsditch
(K 289)
- 201 40 The Little Pool (K 74)
- 300 41 The Piazzetta (K 189)
- 6 42 Reading in Bed (K 28)
- 8 43 Millbank (K 71)
- 10 44 Billingsgate (K 47)
- 100 45 The Beggars (K 194)
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THE GARDEN. (K 210.)

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- 10 46 Fulham (K 182)
- 80 47 Black Lion Wharf (K 42)
- 8 48 Vauxhall Bridge (K 70)
- 30049 The Little Mast (K 185)
- 6 50 Nursemaid and Child (K 37)
- 10 51 The Rag Gatherers (K 23)
- 25 52 Early Morning—Battersea (*litho.*)
- 25 53 La Veille aux Loques (K 21)
- 85 54 Fishing Boat (K 208)
- 80 55 The Thames (*litho.*)